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AUTHOR Barrett, Karin
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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis of this study was that the use of the public library has a positive effect on students' reading achievement. Thirty-three fourth grade students in the below and above average reading classes and their parents were asked several questions about their public library use. The participants were asked about how frequently they went to the library, what types of books they read, whether they participated in the library programs, and whether they visited the library when they were younger. The survey results suggested that there was not enough information to fully satisfy the hypothesis. However, there were several important percentages that could be looked at: (1) above average students frequented the library more than below average students; (2) parents of the above average students took their children to the library at an earlier age than the below average students; and (3) those students in the below average class did not participate in the library programs as often as the above average students. (Contains 16 references; appendixes contain 2 survey instruments.) (Author/RS)

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ED 427 307

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY ON A CHILD'S READING ACHIEVEMENT

BY

KARIN BARNETT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

Kean University
May 1999

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Abstract

The hypothesis of this study was that the use of the public library has a positive effect on students' reading achievement. Thirty-three fourth grade students in the below and above average reading classes and their parents were asked several questions about their public library use. The participants were asked about how frequently they went to the library, what types of books they read, did they participate in the library programs, and did they visit the library when they were younger. The survey results suggested that there was not enough information to fully satisfy the hypothesis. However, there were several important percentages that could be looked at. 1 - Above average students frequented the library more than below average students. 2 - The parents of the above average students took their children to the library at an earlier age than the below average students, and 3 - those students in the below average class did not participate in the library programs as often as the above average students.

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I would like to gratefully thank my husband, Jim, for his continued support through this long process. Without your words of encouragement and help, it may have never ended. Thank you also to my parents who enable me to continue learning.

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The Significance of the Public Library on a Child's Reading Achievement

There has been a theory long held by librarians that quality library services enhance student achievement with regards to education. Several researchers have studied the educational effect of school libraries and its components on student achievement. Their findings point to the idea that library resources are a key part of the total school. (Mancall, 1985)

School libraries were able to expand during the 1960's when funding from the state and federal government came available. (Marchant et. al., 1984) Older libraries were expanded and new ones were built into other elementary schools. Though, by this time, Elizabeth Masterton had already researched the effect of library quality on student reading ability. (Marchant et. al., 1984) She had concluded that a well supervised library situation would improve the reading ability of the majority of students. It was also determined by Masterton that the intellectual level is maintained or improved.

According to Mary Gaver (1963), who studied 271 schools across thirteen states, "higher education gains in reading were achieved by elementary students who used a professionally staffed school library." (Marchant et. al., 1984) Gaver looked at three categories of the elementary school library service; classroom collections, centralized collections, handled by teachers or parents, and school libraries headed by librarians. Her findings included that the quality and quantity of reading was substantially greater with a centralized library. (Marchant et. al., 1984)

Unfortunately, the reduction of funds for education came about and library support was drastically cut back. Verbal SAT scores had dropped at an alarming rate. It is believed

that this is due to the fact that reading comprehension and language skills are associated with library use. (Marchant et. al., 1984)

School library research had begun to gain momentum when Didier conducted her research in 1982. She examined fourth and seventh graders in 94 school districts and found that reading achievement was greater in schools with literacy media programs and specialists. (Didier, 1984) Her article also discussed information from DeBlaw and Gaver. These two researchers found that the very *presence* of library media programs can be related to overall achievement. (Didier, 1984) Didier also goes on to quote Greve about the *level* of media service. This level is determined by the quality and size of the collection, as well as the amount of programs offered. Greve found that overall student achievement is raised as the level is raised. (Didier, 1984) Then, using this information, it was concluded by Natanella that those areas with better socioeconomic factors may have a higher overall student achievement. (Didier, 1984)

One of the largest studies conducted recently (1988-1989) was done in Colorado. Researchers, Julie Boucher and Keith Curry Lance, looked at both school library media centers and public libraries. They found that throughout the state, public libraries work with the schools to ensure student achievement. The public library provides "an invisible support to public education." (Boucher, 1992) Boucher and Lance also reported that all libraries have an involvement with the academic achievement of students.

Hypothesis

Except for the Colorado Study, little research has been done on the effect of the public library system on student achievement. Thus, the question asked, does the public

library system have a role in elementary student achievement? It was hypothesized that it does indeed have an effect on student achievement and the following study was undertaken to determine the validity of this view.

Procedure

To complete the study, two fourth grade reading classes and their parents were surveyed. The students were in either the above average and below average class as placed by their standardized test scores and teacher recommendation. There were approximately thirty-three students and their parent(s) answering the survey.

The student survey consisted of questions about how often they went to the public library, whether or not they enjoyed going, did they participate in the library programs, and what types of books the students chose. The parental survey contained similar questions pertaining to their child.

The students' and parents' answers were then compared and recorded. Averages were used to find if a relationship existed between reading achievement and time spent at the public library.

Results

The results of the survey, as seen in question one, show that students who were above average in reading go to the public library more often than their below average counterparts.

Student Survey:		**Above Average**	**Below Average**
#1 Do you go to the public library?	YES	95.7%	85.14%
	NO	4.34%	14.28%
#2 How often do you go?	Less than 3 time a year	8.69%	14.28%
	3 times a year	19.39%	8.58%
	1 time a month	18.04%	38.57%
	2 times a month	53.47%	38.57%
#3 Who takes you to the library?	Parents	91.30%	85.71%
	Others	13.04%	14.28%
#4 What types of books do you take out of the library?	Fiction - school	43.47%	71.42%
	- pleasure	65.21%	57.14%
	Non - fiction - school	73.91%	28.57%
	- pleasure	39.13%	42.85%
	Poetry - school	0%	14.28%
	- pleasure	8.69%	28.57%
#5 Do you participate in the library programs, such as the summer reading program or storytime?	YES	30.43%	28.57%
	NO	69.56%	71.42%
#6 Do you enjoy going to the library?	YES	69.56%	100%
	NO	30.43%	0%
#7 Do you remember someone taking you to the library when you were in kindergarten or first grade?	YES	56.52%	71.42%
	NO	43.47%	28.57%
#8 Do you remember participating in any of the library programs? (summer reading, storytime)	YES	43.47%	40.57%
	NO	56.52%	59.14%

Parent Survey:		**Above Average**	**Below Average**
#1 Do you take your child to the public library?	YES	100%	100%
	NO	0%	0%
#2 Approximately how often do you take him/her to the library?	Less than 3 times a year	4.34%	38.57%
	3 times a year	21.73%	14.28%
	1 time a month	27.39%	24.28
	2 times a month	57.82%	23.28%
#3 What types of books does your child pick out?	Fiction - school	47.82%	57.14%
	- pleasure	60.86%	85.71%
	Non - fiction - school	73.91%	57.14%
	- pleasure	60.86%	57.14%
	Poetry - school	0%	14.28%
	- pleasure	4.34%	42.85%
#4 Does your child participate in some of the library programs offered? (summer reading, storytime)	YES	30.43%	28.57%
	NO	69.56%	71.42%
#5 Does your child enjoy going to the library?	YES	95.65%	100%
	NO	4.34%	0%
#6 Did you take your child to the library when he/she was in kindergarten and first grade?	YES	100%	100%
	NO	0%	0%
#7 Did he/she participate in the library programs offered at that time?	YES	47.82%	0%
	NO	52.17%	100%
#8 Did you bring your child to the library before he/she started school or when in pre-school?	YES	95.65%	85.71%
	NO	4.34%	14.28%

Parent Survey: (continued)		**Above Average**	**Below Average**
#9 If so, at what age did you start bringing him/her?	2	13.04%	14.28%
	3	56.17%	28.57%
	4	30.43%	28.57%
	5	0%	24.28%
#10 Did your child participate in storytime or any other program at the library?	YES	65.21%	0%
	NO	34.78%	100%

Interesting differences between the samples were found. Question #2, on the student survey, had numbers which followed current research. Only 8.69% of the above average students went to the library less than 3 times a year, whereas 14.28% of the students in the below average class went 3 times a year. 53.47 % of the above average class went to the library 2 times a month and only 38.57% of the below average class went 2 times a month. The parental survey had similar findings for this question.

When the students responded to question #6, did they enjoy going to the library, *all* of the below average students answered yes, while only 69.56% of the above average students responded positively.

Looking at question #7 and 8 on the students' survey also brought about some interesting information. 71.42% of the below average students remember going to the library during the early years of school and 40.57% of them remember participating in the programs offered. However, their parents responded that none of the students actually did participate. (question #7 parental survey)

Finally, question #10 on the parental survey needs to be looked at. 65.21% of the above average parents stated that their child did participate in storytime before entering school, while 0% of the below average students participated.

Conclusions

Library resources are a key part of the total school. (Mancall, 1985) Understanding and believing in this statement can better help students with their academic achievements. There have been many studies done to support this fact and many more continue to be completed. Incorporating the *public* library into a student's childhood can also improve their achievements, according to several studies by Lance, Boucher, and Heyns.

Although the results of this study on public libraries affecting student achievement did not support the hypothesis, there are several individual points important enough to focus on.

The above average students currently visit the public library more frequently than the below average class. This indicates that those students in the higher level class continue to read and research, aiding in their ability to complete work on a fifth grade level.

Also significant was the parents of the above average students had enrolled their children in library programs early in their lives. According to researchers, this reading can enhance a child's comprehension. By participating in storytime, students hear the language more and are able to increase their listening comprehension. Following current research,

listening is an important skill when learning to read. Thus, it can be concluded that one of the reasons these particular students are successful in reading is due to this early exposure.

Those students in the below average class were not taken to the library as often and did not participate in the programs offered when they were younger. This could be an indicator as to why their reading comprehension and reading skills are low.

It is encouraging to discover that those students in the below average class do enjoy going to the library. It is important that their parents realize this delight so they may advocate the importance of reading to their children. There is the possibility that with this enjoyment of the library, the child could improve reading skills.

The results of the survey suggest several implications for reading. Even with no significance, information can be taken from several of the differences in percentages. Students should be brought to the public library and exposed to books early in life. Listening to storytime and given the opportunity to choose their own books will not only expand their vocabulary and increase their comprehension, but will also show children that books are something to treasure and become excited about. Continuing to visit the library while the child is in school will let him/ her continue the ability to expand knowledge and continue to increase comprehension. The public library is an important tool in the education of the child. It enables the child to increase listening skills, increase comprehension skills, and even increase her imagination. The public library should be utilized throughout a child's life.

Public Library Usage and Reading Achievement: Related Research

The elementary school library came into existence in the early 1900's with the help of public libraries and the changing elementary school curriculum. At the start, many of the school libraries were grossly under-funded, under-staffed, and insufficient. Even so people believed that a library was a great component in enriching students' minds and meeting their individual interests. It wasn't until later in the century that researchers turned their attention to achievement and the library.

Increasing student achievement has always been a concern for parents and educators. Many theories have been given and many have been tested. Librarians have long held onto the theory that quality library services enhance student achievement (Mancall, 1985). As with all theories, there needs to be evidence to support it. Several researchers have studied the educational effect of school libraries, as well as some public libraries, and their impact on students' achievement. Their findings point to the idea that library resources are a key part of the total school (Mancall, 1985).

Elizabeth Masterton began her research on the effect of library quality on student reading ability in 1953. She found that a library which was well supervised would improve the reading ability of the majority of students (Marchant et. al., 1984). Masterton also discovered that the intellectual level is maintained or improved when using the library.

Federal and state funding for school libraries came available during the 1960's (Marchant et. al., 1984). With this, libraries were able to grow, or were built, and school collections increased. Mary Gaver, a forerunner in the field of library research, studied 271 schools across thirteen states. She looked at three categories in the elementary school

library service: classroom collections, centralized collections handled by parents or teachers, and school libraries headed by librarians. Her research indicated that the quality and quantity of reading was subsequently greater with a centralized library. Mary Gaver also went on to say that "higher educational gains in reading were achieved by elementary students who used a professionally staffed school library." (Marchant et. al., 1984) The interest in the library system was becoming greater and more important to those who worked within it.

Two years after Mary Gaver concluded her research, Ralph Donnelly McMillen (1965) finished his thesis at Western Reserve University. He wished to justify the educational purpose of the library programs in selected schools in Ohio. McMillen analyzed 173 schools over a period of six years, looking at library book expenditures per pupil and academic achievement. Those schools with good libraries and full time librarians were superior to schools with minimal or no library service in the area of reading comprehension (McMillen, 1965). Thus, students get more reading services with a full time librarian than any other staff (Loertscher, 1975). However, in a study of vocabulary, no significant difference among the schools was found (McMillen, 1965). This is an interesting fact since the idea today is that with more reading comes more exposure to words. Usually, the greater the exposure, the larger a student's vocabulary becomes. Also, studies have shown that subject areas linked with library services include writing, reading, research skills, and language development (Mancall, 1985). Language development grows as the more reading is done.

Researchers began to study other influences of the library on students. Lucile Thorne observed older students and found that boys' reading comprehension improved more than girls' when library services were present in the students' curriculum (Thorne, 1967). The boys' larger increase may be due to the idea that their comprehension was low to begin with, whereas the girls' was just about at grade level. Nevertheless, Thorne did find an increase in reading comprehension in both boys and girls.

At this point in history there had been very little research done to compare the elementary school library system and students' achievement. Comparably, there still continues to be a minimal amount of research, but during the 1970's researchers began to set their studies on disadvantaged areas in the country and the world and so, new conclusions were found. It has been stated that those who use the library more frequently out-distance those who do not in terms of academic achievement, but this is particularly true for inner city and other disadvantaged youngsters (Bowie, 1984). An experiment was completed in Summit, New Jersey during the early 1970's which integrated grades three and four (McGowan, 1973). The group was named S.K.E. and students participating in the experiment were able to go to the library for blocks of time to do research projects and for enjoyment. At the end of the year, students on the third grade level were found to have jumped eighteen months in their grade equivalency for reading comprehension. Those students on the fourth grade level rose twelve months (McGowan, 1973). These increases were far beyond the hypothesized expectations first laid out by the teachers.

In other parts of the country and the world, other research was being conducted on disadvantaged children. Paul Streiff and his colleagues traveled to the remote villages of

Alaska and looked at twelve schools which had very little library resources. Streiff wished to set up the Bethel Alaska Regional Library as an exemplary library and determine whether or not students in these remote areas would continue the belief that library services enhance student achievement. Through questionnaires, testing, and interviews, Streiff found those students and teachers who were high users (used the library frequently) were more independent readers than low users. Students who were high users also scored significantly higher on cloze procedures and were found to take more risks (Streiff, 1976). However, in these Alaskan villages, comprehension did not increase in the high uses schools. There could be many determining factors for this finding. The primary language for students was Eskimoan, not English, so a language barrier may have hindered students. Also, the prior knowledge of the students was very limited and this too may have been a determinant. Streiff recommends that students use the library more to gain more experiences/prior knowledge which may then increase comprehension (Streiff, 1976).

Continuing to look at disadvantaged students, Bell (1976) and Heyns (1978) studied Birmingham, Alabama and inner city Atlanta, Georgia, respectively. Both cities' library systems were lacking in resources or non-existent. In Birmingham, citizens used tax dollars to set up a library system in the schools and found that the impact on the classroom was measurable (Bell, 1976). Not only did students become excited about reading, but they increased their reading ability and became interested enough to write and produce their own theatrical productions (Bowie, 1984).

Barbara Heyns looked at the Atlanta public library system to determine whether or not reading scores went up during the summer months if students continued to read. She

concluded that students must be exposed to good collections if they are going to succeed academically (Bowie, 1984). Heyns wrote in this monumental study:

> "The single summer activity that is most strongly and consistently related to summer learning is reading. Whether by the number of books read or by regularity of library usage, reading during the summer systematically increases the vocabulary test scores of children... Summer reading has a substantial effect on achievement that is largely independent of family background..." (Bowie, 1984)

Again with continued library use, students' reading and other academic subjects were strengthened. Rutler did one last study in a disadvantage area. He looked at the inner city schools of London during the 1978-1979 school year. He also found that when schools having good media centers stayed open after hours, students would use it and their academic outcomes were higher (Bowie, 1984).

Why does library usage have such a positive effect on a student's reading? People believe that it gives the reader the freedom to pursue individually selected concepts at his/her own pace. Also, the use of multimedia in reading programs increases experiences, which is then related to comprehension (Bowie, 1984). (This is what Streiff recommended in Alaska) Woodbury (1980) reiterates this same idea by stating that students learn to read better when the materials chosen interest them. This self selection and individualized reading can raise reading scores for all students (Bowie, 1984).

As research moved into the 1980's, different aspects of the library system again were looked at and studies became larger. Didier conducted her research in 1982. She examined fourth and seventh graders in ninety four districts and concluded that reading

achievement was greater in schools with library media programs and specialists (Didier, 1984). Adding to her research, Didier discussed information from DeBlaw and Gaver. Both researchers found that the very *presence* of library media programs can be related to a student's overall achievement (Didier, 1984). In the same article, Didier quotes Greve about the *level* of media service. This level is determined by the quality and size of the collection, as well as the amount of programs offered. Greve discovered that overall student achievement is raised as the level is raised (Didier, 1984). Natanella used this same information to confirm the idea most people would conclude; areas with better socioeconomic factors may have higher overall student achievement (Didier, 1984).

The public library system and education had, up until this point, almost no research conducted on them. Keith Curry Lance and Julie Boucher conducted one of the largest studies in Colorado recently, looking at both the public and school media system. They found that throughout the state public libraries work with the schools to ensure students achievement. The public library provides "an invisible support to public education." (Boucher, 1992) Recently, research has moved to the states' and countries' declining library systems. With the library funds disappearing, educators are seeing an effect on student achievement. Parts of Prince Georges County, Maryland had a very limited library system and students rarely used it. In 1992, Karen Lynn conducted an experiment to improve achievement among black seventh and eighth grade students. The question to be determined was whether or not the audiovisual and reading tutoring methods used in the media center would be effective (Lynn, 1992). After a year of tutoring in poetry and extra help elsewhere, the program was deemed effective since each student reached the

appropriate literacy level needed. The book expenditures per pupil has also been reduced in the last few years. Stephen Krashen researched fourth graders in forty-one states because of the reduction. By looking at the 1992 scores on the students' NAEP Reading Comprehension Test and the average number of books and library services available to the students, Krashen was able to determine that the reading comprehension scores positively correlated with the number of books per student (Krashen, 1995). However, it was concluded that it is not the library expenditures which relate directly to reading scores, but in fact the money invested in the library which then affects the collection of books. This collection significantly affects a student's scores (Krashen, 1995). California's students are suffering also from their lack of a school library media center. In a recent survey, the state ranked 50 out of 50 for providing school library services (Hones, 1996). Following the statement of Kathy Owyang Turner that, "Well equipped libraries are one of the most effective and efficient ways to reach the students...", (Hones, 1996) citizens of San Francisco set up the California Media Center 2000 Project. The aim was twofold. One - to establish San Francisco school libraries as a critical factor in academic success. Two - improve the link between school libraries and the San Francisco public libraries. This on going project has already shown that student academic outcomes have improved with the revitalized school libraries (Hones, 1996).

Around the world, countries have been noticed for their library systems. It was found in Canada that those students who borrow books have a considerable advantage over those who do not (Froese, 1997).

Based on these many studies, the need for improved public library services has risen. What can be done? The public library "provides an important opportunity for young children to develop reading and a love of books, the first rung on the ladder to literacy and learning..." (Deham, 1997). Many libraries have begun their own programs to build this first rung. Story time is popular among the small children. Here, an adult will read to the child, making sure to include all types of text - narrative, conceptual, expository, and poetry. The librarian will also engage in pre-reading and post reading activities to enhance the literature. All of this being essential to the growth and literacy of the child.

In order to attain quality story time and student achievement, successful literacy programs must have a wide variety of printed materials. Librarians know this material needs to have a variety of titles and be presented in exciting formats. Book displays must catch a readers' eye and book-talks must engage him/her fully.

Public libraries have the job of making many students feel successful. The self-esteem that has been built has the ability to show students that they can be competent learners. A competent learner can then set obtainable goals and engage themselves in their own responsibility for learning.

Finally, several public libraries throughout the world have distributed materials to homes or facilities that cannot make it to the library. Underprivileged daycares benefit from this program greatly since teachers and aides are able to read aloud to students and enable them to become literate and successful children. All citizens have the prospect of becoming better readers and better achievers with these opportunities.

Throughout the decades, comparably little research has been done to show whether school library media centers have a positive effect on student academic achievement. Even less has been done on the public library system. It's a wonder that this is so since the library is a creation of the twentieth century and we are almost at the end of it. Those studies that have been completed overwhelmingly point to the idea that library programs represent a valuable resource that can contribute to student achievement. The school media specialists' jobs are changing because of these finding (Bowie, 1984). The integration of the media center and curriculum is becoming more widespread as well as the role of the media specialist itself. Instructional development is required so that a student's experiences can be broadened, their vocabulary enhanced, and all other academic skills strengthened. The public library also has its place in this circle. More and more students are turning there for information and summer reading. Continued interest and funding in both types of libraries is not only necessary but imperative. Research shows that the library system does make a difference.

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Appendices

Survey

Answer each question as best as you can

1. Do you go to the public library?

yes no

2. How often do you go?

less than 3 times a year
3 times a year
1 time a month
2 times a month
Other: _____

3. Who takes you to the library?

_____

4. What types of books do you take out of the library?
(circle as many as apply)

fiction - for school	fiction - for pleasure
non-fiction - for school	non-fiction - for pleasure
poetry - for school	poetry - for pleasure

5. Do you participate in the library programs, such as the summer reading program or storytime?

yes no

6. Do you enjoy going to the library?

yes no

Why?

7. Do you remember someone taking you to the library when you were in kindergarten or first grade?

yes no

8. Do you remember participating in any of the library programs? (summer reading, storytime)

yes no

Dear Parents,

This year I have been working on my thesis for my graduate studies. My research has been focused on students' reading achievement and their use of the public library. In order to help my study, I need to take a survey of some of the fourth grade students and their parents. Your child has filled out a similar survey in school and it would very helpful if you could fill out this survey as well. I greatly appreciate your help and time.

Thank you,

K. Barrett

Survey

**Please fill out this survey and return it to school with your child by Fri, Jan 29th*
**Answer the questions as best you can*

1. Do you take your child to the public library?

yes no

2. Approximately how often do you take him/her to the library?

less than 3 time a year
3 times a year
1 time a month
2 times a month
Other: _____

3. What types of books does your child pick out? (choose all that apply)

fiction - for school	fiction - for pleasure
non-fiction - for school	non-fiction - for pleasure
poetry - for school	poetry - for pleasure

4. Does your child participate in some of the library programs offered? (summer reading program, storytime)

yes no

5. Does your child enjoy going to the library?

yes no

6. Did you take your child to the library when he/she was in kindergarten and first grade?

yes no

7. Did he/she participate in the library programs offered at that time?

yes no

8. Did you bring your child to the library before he/she started school or when in pre-school?

yes no

If so, at what age did you start bringing him/her? _____
Did your child participate in storytime or other programs?

yes no

Thank you for the information!